

WE CLAIM:

1. A spam blocking system comprising:
 - an approved sender database configured to store information identifying a plurality of senders that have been approved to send emails to a recipient; and
 - a processing system configured to:
 - receive an incoming email from a sender to the recipient;
 - determine whether information identifying the sender is in the approved sender database;
 - if information identifying the sender is not in the approved sender database, direct the sender to take a test configured to only be passable with input from an individual;
 - determine whether the sender has passed the test; and
 - if the sender has passed the test, place information identifying the sender in the approved sender database.
2. The system of Claim 1 wherein the test is to enter characters appearing against a partially-obscuring background on a webpage.
3. The system of Claim 1 wherein the processing system is configured to ask the recipient whether to place information identifying the sender in the approved sender database before placing the information identifying the sender in the approved sender database.
4. The system of Claim 1 wherein the processing system is configured to deliver the email to the recipient if the sender passes the test.
5. The system of Claim 1 wherein the processing system is configured to redirect or block the email from reaching the recipient if the sender does not pass the test.

6. The system of Claim 1 wherein the processing system is configured to deliver the email to the recipient if information identifying the sender is in the approved sender database.

7. The system of Claim 1 further including a blocked sender database configured to store information identifying a plurality of senders that are to be blocked from sending emails to the recipient and wherein the processing system is configured to:

determine whether information identifying the sender is in the blocked sender database; and

if information identifying the sender is in the blocked sender database, not to direct the sender to take the test and to redirect or block the email from reaching the recipient.

8. A spam blocking process for use in connection with an approved sender database configured to store information identifying a plurality of senders that have been approved to send emails to a recipient, the process comprising:

receive an incoming email from a sender to the recipient;

determine whether information identifying the sender is in the approved sender database;

if information identifying the sender is not in the approved sender database, direct the sender to take a test configured to only be passable with input from an individual;

determine whether the sender has passed the test; and

if the sender has passed the test, place information identifying the sender in the approved sender database.

9. The process of Claim 8 wherein the test is to enter characters appearing against a partially-obscuring background on a webpage.

10. The process of Claim 8 further comprising ask the recipient whether to place information identifying the sender in the approved sender database before placing the information identifying the sender in the approved sender database.

11. The process of Claim 8 further comprising deliver the email to the recipient if the sender passes the test.

12. The process of Claim 8 further comprising redirect or block the email from reaching the recipient if the sender does not pass the test.

13. The process of Claim 8 further comprising deliver the email to the recipient if information identifying the sender is in the approved sender database.

14. The process of Claim 8 configured for use in connection with a blocked sender database configured to store information identifying a plurality of senders that are to be blocked from sending emails to the recipient, wherein the process further comprises:

determine whether information identifying the sender is in the blocked sender database; and

if information identifying the sender is in the blocked sender database, not to direct the sender to take the test and to redirect or block the email from reaching the recipient.

15. Computer-readable storage media containing computer-readable instructions which when cause a computing system installed in the computing system to implement a spam blocking process for use in connection with an approved sender database configured to store information identifying a plurality of senders that have been approved to send emails to a recipient, the process comprising:

receive an incoming email from a sender to the recipient;

determine whether information identifying the sender is in the approved sender database;

if information identifying the sender is not in the approved sender database, direct the sender to take a test configured to only be passable with input from an individual;

determine whether the sender has passed the test; and

if the sender has passed the test, place information identifying the sender in the approved sender database.

16. The media of Claim 15 wherein the test is to enter characters appearing against a partially-obscuring background on a webpage.

17. The media of Claim 15 wherein the process further comprises ask the recipient whether to place information identifying the sender in the approved sender database before placing the information identifying the sender in the approved sender database.

18. The media of Claim 15 wherein the process further comprises deliver the email to the recipient if the sender passes the test.

19. The media of Claim 15 wherein the process further comprises redirect or block the email from reaching the recipient if the sender does not pass the test.

20. The media of Claim 15 wherein the process further comprises deliver the email to the recipient if information identifying the sender is in the approved sender database.

21. The media of Claim 15 configured for use in connection with a blocked sender database configured to store information identifying a plurality of senders that are to be blocked from sending emails to the recipient, wherein the process further comprises:

determine whether information identifying the sender is in the blocked sender database; and

if information identifying the sender is in the blocked sender database, not to direct the sender to take the test and to redirect or block the email from reaching the recipient.